UNITED
NATIONS

S

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/20
7 January 1999
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH

SPECIAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with paragraph 19 of Security Council resolution 1181 (1998) of 13 July 1998, I submitted my third progress report on the situation in Sierra Leone on 16 December 1998 (S/1998/1176). In view of the serious developments in the country since that time, I have decided to submit the present report, which contains updated information and revised observations and recommendations.

II. MILITARY AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS

2. On 17 December 1998, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) opened an attack aimed at Kailahun district in the eastern province, an important rebel base and supply point. However, the ECOMOG attack achieved only limited progress. The south of the country, including Bo, the second largest city, remained calm.

3. Starting on 18 December 1998, the military and security situation in Sierra Leone took a sharply unfavourable turn. A strong rebel attack on Koidu in the eastern province obliged ECOMOG to fall back, eventually as far as Magburaka in the centre of the country, while sustaining heavy casualties from ambushes along the route.

4. On 22 December, a third group of rebels in the western area attacked Waterloo, about 20 miles from Freetown on the road connecting the capital with the rest of the country. The attack resulted in heavy casualties among civilians and the looting and destruction of property and sent thousands of people fleeing towards Freetown.

5. In response to these developments, on 23 December 1998, United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) withdrew the seven United Nations military observers who had been deployed there since August from Makeni to Lungi, along with some of their equipment. National staff of the World Food Programme (WFP) were also relocated from Makeni to Freetown on the same day. Three United Nations military observers who had been sent to Daru in connection with the ECOMOG advance against Kailahun were also withdrawn to Kenema.

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6. Tension continued to rise in Freetown in anticipation of a possible rebel attack. A rebel leader, Sam Bockarie, threatened to launch an assault on the capital around the New Year unless the Government released the leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Corporal Foday Sankoh, and rebels advancing in the countryside announced that they were "fighting ECOMOG and the United Nations". On 24 December, as a precautionary measure, UNOMSIL began relocating non-essential civilian staff from Freetown and withdrew the military observer teams deployed at Bo and Kenema to Lungi. United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and international non-governmental organizations also began to withdraw their personnel from the country. Governments with diplomatic representation in Freetown began reducing their embassy staff and subsequently withdrew all their personnel. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also sent two aircraft to evacuate British and other nationals from Sierra Leone.

7. On 27 December 1998, Makeni fell to the rebels, who seized a number of vehicles in the town, greatly enhancing their mobility and speed of movement. The fall of Makeni removed an important obstacle to the rebels' ability to combine their forces and placed them in a position to attack Freetown and the airport at Lungi. The following day, UNOMSIL withdrew most of its personnel from Freetown to Conakry, leaving a small core team led by my Special Representative for Sierra Leone, Francis Okelo, and comprising the Chief Military Observer, Brigadier-General Subhash Joshi (India), and other senior staff, as well as a few military observers.

8. In the closing days of December, the rebels advanced further westward, moving into Lunsar, engaging ECOMOG at Port Loko, and attacking Waterloo and Hastings. ECOMOG continued to bring in further reinforcements, including three fresh battalions over the new year.

9. On 4 January 1999, President Kabbah paid a one-day visit to Bamako concerning the early deployment of a contingent of Malian troops to reinforce ECOMOG in Sierra Leone. The troops are being financed by a contribution from the Netherlands and their transportation to Lungi is being arranged through the logistics supply company PAE, with funding to be provided by the United Kingdom. A similar arrangement is being put in place to transport Gambian troops. The Government of the United Kingdom has also announced the provision of a further one million pounds to the Government and to ECOMOG.

10. In the early hours of 6 January, rebels attacking from the east of the city penetrated to the centre of Freetown, where they opened Pademba Road prison, freeing hundreds of prisoners detained for offences relating to the period of junta rule, as well as former soldiers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces. The rebels also set fire to some buildings, including the Nigerian High Commission. By nightfall of that day, the city was quiet, with rebels apparently in control of the centre around the State House. On the same day, UNOMSIL completed its evacuation from Freetown.

III. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

11. On 20 December 1998, President Charles Taylor of Liberia announced the closure of the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone and stated that he had ordered Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) personnel to deploy at the border. President Taylor informed the Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia, Felix Downes-Thomas, that he had received intelligence reports concerning an impending attack against the territory of Liberia to take place in the latter part of December. President Taylor said he believed that the attack, to be mounted by elements of former Liberian warring factions based in Zimmi, southern Sierra Leone, would take place in the context of a planned offensive by ECOMOG and the Sierra Leonean Civil Defence Force (CDF) against the rebels at Kailahun. President Taylor proposed that ECOMOG troops in Liberia should mount joint patrols with Liberian personnel along the border and called for an investigation into the attack reportedly planned by ECOMOG against the rebels in Sierra Leone.

12. Mr. Downes-Thomas and Mr. Okelo have urged President Taylor and President Kabbah to discuss the situation directly and will, if requested, offer their good offices accordingly.

13. On 28 December, my Special Representative attended an extraordinary ministerial-level meeting of the ECOWAS Committee of Five on Sierra Leone in Abidjan, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Togo. The Committee, which comprises Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria, was expanded to include Togo, the current Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). A representative of Burkina Faso, the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), also attended, as well as representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

14. According to the final communiqué issued by the Committee, both the Force Commander of ECOMOG and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sierra Leone implicated Liberia in providing military support to the rebels. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia denied any involvement by his country in Sierra Leone and called for an international investigation. The meeting was also informed by the Government of Sierra Leone and ECOMOG that mercenaries were fighting alongside the rebels, in contravention of international law. The Government of Liberia subsequently issued a statement expressing disappointment and indignation at the allegations against it, reiterating that it was not providing support to the rebels and demanding concrete proof of the allegations. The Government of Liberia further asserted that the current and former Governments of Sierra Leone had employed Liberian mercenaries, which tended to destabilize the subregion.

15. In a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council dated 6 January 1999 (S/1999/17, annex), President Taylor reiterated that the Government of Liberia was in no way supporting the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council/Revolutionary United Front (AFRC/RUF) forces in Sierra Leone, and that it continued to abide by all existing Council resolutions and embargoes. Citing the lack of evidence or proof produced by those who had accused his Government of doing so, President Taylor called on the Security Council to investigate the

allegations and again proposed that the United Nations establish a mechanism to monitor the border between the two countries.

16. The Committee, now known as the Committee of Six on Sierra Leone, appealed to the rebels to cease fighting immediately, to lay down their arms and to recognize the Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah as the legitimate Government in Sierra Leone, to participate in dialogue and to accept the Government's offer of amnesty. The Committee, inter alia, also urged the international community to leave the rebels in no doubt that they would never be accorded recognition as the legitimate Government. The communiqué, which has been circulated as document S/1998/1232, called for an expedited provision of logistical support to ECOMOG. It expressed grave concern at the aggression being perpetrated against Sierra Leone and strongly condemned the activities of the countries providing support to the rebels. The communiqué condemned the presence of mercenaries in Sierra Leone.

17. The Committee of Six called on the Chairman of ECOWAS to embark on initiatives to develop true and genuine rapprochement between the Heads of State of Sierra Leone and Liberia and resolved to deploy all measures necessary to re-establish dialogue between the Government and the rebels, as prescribed in the Abidjan and Conakry peace agreements.

18. On 7 January 1999, the presidency of Togo, the current Chairman of ECOWAS, launched an urgent appeal to the President of Sierra Leone and the leader of the rebel forces to order a halt to the fighting. In his statement, President Gnassingbé Eyadema stressed that, as the forces of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group were forces of peace, their mission in Sierra Leone was to help the Sierra Leonean brothers put an end to the fratricidal war and find a political solution to the conflict between them. President Edayema urged the President of Sierra Leone and the head of the rebel forces to order their troops to lay down their arms in order to permit the opening of a political dialogue between the Sierra Leonean brothers with a view to a definitive settlement of the crisis.

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS ASPECTS

19. Recent rebel attacks in the east and west have involved the killing of civilians, the destruction of homes and abductions. Women and children have been deliberately targeted with close-range gunfire and other civilians have been summarily executed.

20. Following the withdrawal of military observers from Makeni, Bo and Kenema, it has been difficult for UNOMSIL to gather reliable information about the human rights situation in the countryside, particularly in the areas recently overrun by the rebels. However, the rebel attacks have certainly resulted in population displacements and, it is feared, the killing of civilians.

21. While much of the ECOMOG activity around Freetown was militarily justified, UNOMSIL has received complaints of assault, harassment and unnecessary detention, primarily of young men. Members of the pro-Government CDF have been accused of summarily killing one person during a house raid on 26 December.

22. On 26 December, a number of prominent personalities organized and addressed a large rally in the city centre. Many of the speeches were highly inflammatory and called on people to take the law into their own hands regarding alleged rebels or rebel sympathizers. During the proceedings, some members of the crowd seized two men and accused them of being rebels. UNOMSIL personnel witnessed the murder of the two men by persons in the crowd, with the clear support of onlookers. When the identities of the two victims were later ascertained, there was no indication that they harboured sympathies for the rebels.

23. Immediately after the incident, my Special Representative expressed his grave concern to the President and requested Government intervention to restrain similar inflammatory statements and acts of violence. The Minister for Information then broadcast a message calling on people to desist from revenge attacks and to hand all suspects over to the authorities. No further such incidents were reported that day.

V. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

24. The humanitarian implications of the recent developments in Sierra Leone are very troubling. Overland access to the interior has been cut, and the capacity to provide humanitarian assistance has been sharply reduced as all expatriate staff of international non-governmental organizations and most United Nations agency and ICRC staff have been relocated outside of the country. While sufficient food stocks are available in country to meet the immediate needs, delivery much beyond Freetown is no longer possible. The country might soon be facing a humanitarian crisis of major proportions.

25. Rebel advances have been preceded by the displacement of large numbers of civilians in an attempt to flee the violence. It is estimated that as many as 40,000 internally displaced persons were concentrated in Makeni prior to the attack on that city. Closer to Freetown, in Waterloo, rebel attacks prompted the flight of 12,000 internally displaced persons and Liberian refugees residing in a camp to Freetown. Though some may now have returned to the camp, lack of access prevents humanitarian agencies from assessing their situation and distributing assistance. The continued violence also raises the prospect of refugee flows to neighbouring countries.

VI. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

26. As indicated in my report of 16 December 1998, the General Assembly, by its resolution 53/29 of 20 November 1998, appropriated an amount of $9.1 million gross for the UNOMSIL operation for the period from 14 January to 30 June 1999, equivalent to some $1.6 million gross per month, subject to the decision of the Security Council to extend the mandate of the Observer Mission beyond 13 January 1999.

27. Therefore, should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNOMSIL, as recommended in paragraph 37 below, the cost of maintaining UNOMSIL during the extension period will be within the monthly rate approved by the General Assembly.

28. As at 31 December 1998, the total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1,593.9 million.

29. With regard to the Trust Fund to Support United Nations Peacekeeping-related Efforts in Sierra Leone, total contributions received as at 31 December 1998 amounted to $1.8 million, with authorized expenditure totalling some $0.1 million.

VII. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

30. Sierra Leone has suffered a serious setback. I deplore the recent intensification of hostilities and the rebel attacks on Freetown. Nevertheless, the international community has not abandoned Sierra Leone, and should not do so.

31. The ECOWAS Committee of Six on Sierra Leone has shown commendable initiative and resolve. I endorse its conclusions and urge ECOWAS to meet at the summit level as soon as possible, with the participation of all interested countries, to consider ways of dealing with the current situation. The summit should consider how best to continue its support for the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone, how to achieve a political settlement of the conflict and how to relieve the humanitarian needs of the Sierra Leonean people.

32. Nevertheless, ECOWAS and ECOMOG should not bear the burden alone. I commend the Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States for their past and continuing efforts to ensure the provision of the necessary logistical support to ECOMOG, and encourage Member States to be prepared to make further contributions to the peace process as may be required.

33. I also welcome the various efforts that have been made to secure a peaceful solution to the conflict through dialogue, including those by the President of the Gambia and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

34. Military successes will not win the rebels legitimacy or recognition. I therefore call on them to open discussions with the Government on any legitimate political demands and grievances they or their supporters may have.

35. The future of UNOMSIL now appears much less clear than it did only a matter of weeks ago, and the modest expansion of the civilian staff that I envisaged in my report of 16 December is untenable in the present circumstances.

36. Nevertheless, I believe there is much that UNOMSIL can do. It can facilitate discussions between the Government and the rebels as required; help reactivate the programme to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate into society former Sierra Leonean fighters; continue to support initiatives for the reconstitution of a national army and the reform of the national police in order to establish an effective security system; and continue to monitor the human rights situation.

37. I therefore recommend that the mandate of UNOMSIL be extended for a two-month period, until 13 March 1999. While the mandate of the Mission, as set

forth in resolution 1181 (1998), should remain essentially unchanged, I intend to reduce the number of military observers, retaining in Conakry a small number who would return to Sierra Leone when conditions permit, as well as the necessary civilian substantive and logistical support staff under the leadership of my Special Representative. I will, of course, keep the Security Council duly informed of any relevant developments in this regard.

38. My Special Representative, the Chief Military Observer and the men and women of the military and civilian staff of UNOMSIL have continued to perform their duties faithfully in a climate increasingly fraught with danger and hostility. I commend them for their courage and professionalism. With them, I look forward to a time when those who have been relocated can return to complete their vital work in Sierra Leone.

39. In this context, I wish to extend my gratitude to the Government of Guinea for its cooperation during the relocation of UNOMSIL and other United Nations staff to Conakry.

Annex

The United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone: contributions as at 10 January 1999

	Military observers	Others[a]	Total
China	3		3
Egypt	2		2
India	6	15	21
Kenya	4		4
Kyrgyzstan	1		1
New Zealand	2		2
Pakistan	5		5
Russian Federation	7		7
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	7		7
Zambia	4		4
Total	41[b]	15	56

[a] Medical team.

[b] Including the Chief Military Observer.

Map No. 4065 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS
January 1999

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